

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1063
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USMISSION OECD PARIS
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH
C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 03371

E.O. L1652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, UK
SUBJECT: EC DIRECT ELECTIONS: GOVERNMENT OPTS FOR
WHITE PAPER

: A) LONDON 3175 B) LONDON 2045 C) LONDON 3109

SUMMARY. THE CABINET'S SPECIAL MEETING ON THE ISSUE
OF DIRECT ELECTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FAILED
TO PRODUCE A CONSENSUS ON ACTION TO MEET BRITAIN'S COM-
MITMENT. WITH THE CABINET STILL DIVIDED ON THE ISSUE
AND A WHITE PAPER PROMISED, FURTHER DELAY MAY BE
EXPECTED. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE SPECIAL FEBRUARY 25 CABINET MEETING TO
DETERMINE THE NEXT STEPS TO MEET BRITAIN'S COMMITMENT
TO HOLD DIRECT ELECTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
WAS INCONCLUSIVE. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, THE CABINET
REMAINS DIVIDED ON THE ISSUE AND COULD NOT AGREE TO
PROCEED WITH IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION. IN ADDITION TO
THE WELL-KNOWN PRO/ANTI-EC DIVISION IN THE CABINET,

THERE IS A NOTABLE LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS ON THE PART OF CHANCELLOR HEALEY (REF A) AND SEVERAL OTHER NOMINALLY PRO-EUROPEAN CABINET MINISTERS. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE BEST THAT COULD BE AGREED TO WAS THE ISSUANCE OF A WHITE PAPER SETTING OUT THE VARIOUS PROCEDURAL OPTIONS FOR THE ELECTION.

2. COMMENT: THE ODDS ON BRITAIN'S MAKING THE MAY-JUNE 1978 DEADLINE -- AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT -- APPEAR TO HAVE BECOME EVEN LESS FAVORABLE. WITH THE DEVOLUTION BILL EFFECTIVELY DEAD FOR THE BALANCE OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENT (REF B AND C), THE LEGISLATIVE WAY IS CLEAR FOR A DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL. ON THE BASIS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FEBRUARY 25 DECISION TO ISSUE A WHITE PAPER RATHER THAN INTRODUCE LEGISLATION, THE OUTLOOK IS FOR FURTHER DELAY. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE WHITE PAPER CAN BE DRAFTED AND DEBATED AND THE IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION PREPARED AND INTRODUCED MUCH BEFORE THE LATE SPRING OR EARLY SUMMER. THE GOVERNMENT, ACCORDINGLY, WILL PROBABLY BE HARD PRESSED TO WIN APPROVAL OF A DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL BEFORE PARLIAMENT RISES IN LATE JULY OR EARLY AUGUST. BEING A CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE, THE DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL WILL BE DEBATED BY COMMONS SITTING AS A COMMITTEE, MAKING IT PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO FILIBUSTER, AND PERHAPS EXTENSIVE REVISION IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS. A DELAY OF THE MAGNITUDE DESCRIBED WOULD MOST PROBABLY PRECLUDE COMPLETION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROCEDURAL STEPS REQUIRED FOR AN ELECTION WITHIN THE AGREED-UPON TIMEFRAME.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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